



Senators Feinstein, Hatch Introduce Bill to Combat Gang Violence January 27, 2005

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) has introduced legislation along with Senators Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), John Cornyn (R-Texas), and Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) to tackle gang violence by increasing criminal penalties and targeting law enforcement efforts at gangs who recruit children.

“Street gangs destroy neighborhoods, cripple families, and kill innocent people,” Senator Feinstein said. **“They continue to grow, crossing city and state borders, and increasing in violent activity. The growth in size and complexity of gangs requires a carefully tailored Federal response that can bring to bear the resources of Federal law enforcement, while at the same time preserving the traditional role of state and local police and prosecutors. This bill will do that.”**

The *Gang Prevention and Effective Deterrence Act*, which Senators Feinstein and Hatch introduced on Tuesday, would:

- Authorize \$650 million over the next five years to support Federal, State and local law enforcement efforts against violent gangs, including witness protection, intervention and prevention programs for at-risk youth, and more funding for federal prosecutors and FBI agents involved in coordinated enforcement efforts against violent gangs.
- Create new criminal gang prosecution offenses, enhance existing gang and violent crime penalties to deter and punish illegal street gangs, propose violent crime reforms needed to effectively prosecute gang members, and propose a limited reform of the juvenile justice system to facilitate federal prosecution of 16 and 17-year-old gang members who commit serious acts of violence.

Los Angeles alone has 45,689 gang members, according to local law enforcement officials. And nationally, the latest figures from the Department of Justice, there were about 731,500 gang members and 21,500 gangs in 2002. Additionally, the FBI report on national crime statistics found that youth-gang homicides had jumped to more than 1,100 in 2002, up from 692 in 1999.

“The bottom line is that gangs represent a serious national threat, and the problem calls for a serious national response,” Senator Feinstein said.

In 1996, Senators Feinstein, Hatch and others introduced the Federal Gang Violence Act, which would have increased criminal penalties for gang members, made recruiting persons into a criminal street gang a crime, and enhanced penalties for transferring a gun to a minor.

Many of the provisions of that bill were incorporated into the 1999 Juvenile Justice bill, which was approved overwhelmingly (73-25) by the Senate in the 106th Congress. However, the Juvenile Justice bill stalled in Conference Committee, and these provisions were never signed into law.

The bill was approved by the Judiciary Committee during the 108th Congress, but was never brought to the floor of the Senate for action.

“We worked hard on this bill in the last Congress, building a bipartisan consensus. And while we made great progress, there was not enough time for the whole Senate to consider the bill. This coming year we will return to this task, and I am confident we will pass legislation addressing this terrible problem,” Senator Feinstein said.

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